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MUSIC-STORIES FROM THE FIRST GRADE, ETHICAL CULTURE SCHOOL

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New York City

Teachers are more and more realizing the educative power of self-expression, and are finding many ways of turning to account this phase of the child's activity. Many avenues are already opened through manual training, art, dramatization, and kindred subjects. English composition, both oral and written, has received much attention, but another side of expression—music—has been lightly touched upon, or neglected altogether.

Many children live in a world of childish melodies, and the kindly sun of encouragement needs but to shine into this little world to make it bring forth a rich fruitage of "song-stories" as truly self-expressive as any other of their activities. The child sings his experiences almost as readily as he tells them, and early appreciates the kind of music necessary to convey his idea. If singing of sunshine, blue sky, or the flutter of birds, his music-story must be bright, light, and happy; if putting the baby to sleep, it must be quiet; if telling of the rough wind that bends the trees or brings the snow, it must be stirring and strong. Sometimes all words are omitted and only the tune is hummed, the other children guessing what meaning the music is intended to convey.

Along with the encouragement of the children's own productions goes other work in music intended to train the ear and voice, to lead to an appreciation of good music, and to give, though unconsciously, a comparative basis for original composition.

Whistles, farm calls, and sounds from nature are early introduced. Constant practice is given in singing rote-songs of merit. These songs are frequently tested by the child's own standards. He listens to the music of a wind-song, for instance, and tells

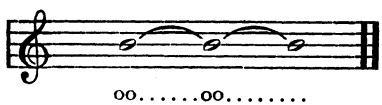
whether it adequately expresses the sentiment which the words convey. Frequently the child makes his own song, comparing it with the rote-song in process of learning. Composition and memorizing go constantly hand in hand.

Sometimes a number of experiences are combined forming a connected story, and all available material is used. At one time the following "story" was told by children of the first grade to those of the second and third, and the programme is given just as it was arranged by them.

Several children who spoke of traveling decided they must wear coats and hats; those who spoke of hoeing must have hoes; the one who sang of the harvest must have a sickle; while the dairy maids must have pails. Marion was chosen by the class to tell the story because, after hearing others, it was decided she could do it best.

Marion (spoken): "All of us have been away this summer. First we took the ferry-boat. That blows a long whistle as it leaves the dock."

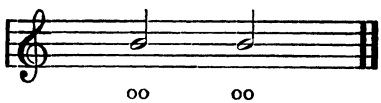
I



WHISTLE OF FERRY-BOAT

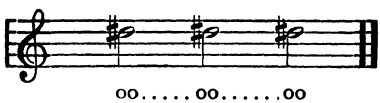
M.: "We passed a boat in the river and had to signal to it."

II



M.: "We saw another boat and it saluted us."

III



SALUTE (WHISTLE)

M.: "When we got to the other side of the river, we got on the cars. Some of us had to go to sleep on the cars and ride all night."

Said and acted by Peggy with eyes partly closed, while she played "train":

Choo-choo-choo
Choo-choo-choo

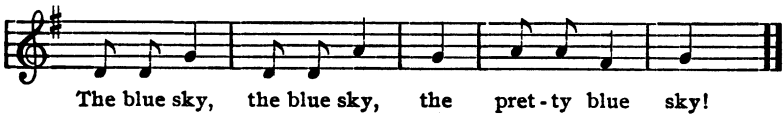
M.: "When we woke up, we were in the country. We had to drive to the farm. This is the way the farmer drove:"

(Acted by Jonas, who "clucked" and drove his imaginary horse with vigor.)

M.: "When we got to the farm, there were *so* many things to see. We looked at the sky."

Sung by Marie:

IV



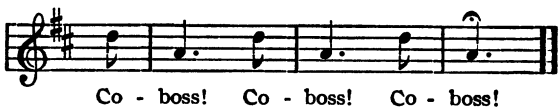
M.: "We saw the farmers hoeing."

Acted and sung by seven children:

"Hoeing, hoeing, here we go,
Seven farmers in a row,
Hoeing, hoeing, hoeing free,
Farmer's life's the life for me."[1]

M.: "Nearly every day we went with the farmer to get the cows. This is the way we called them:"

V



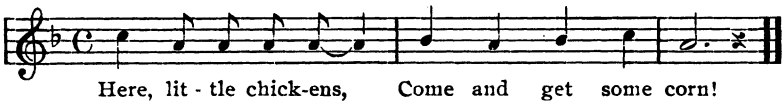
M.: "One day some little girls thought they would like to play they were dairy maids, and this is their song:"

(Eleanor Smith's *Music Primer,* p. 9.)

M.: "Laura liked to feed the chickens. This is her song that she sang when she fed them:"

[1] Adapted from Eleanor Smith's *Music Primer,* "Left! Right!", p. 49.

VI

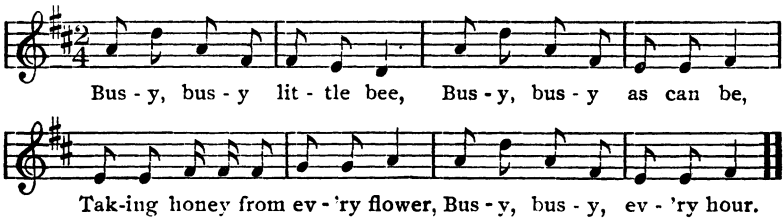


CALLING THE CHICKENS

Several children impersonated the chickens and hopped right sprightly for the imaginary corn.

M.: "Peggy watched the bees and made up this little song:"

VII



M.: "I saw a bluebird and made this rhyme about him:

'I know a little bluebird,
His back is all in blue,
And when he sings a little song,
I always think of you.'"

M.: "But we had to leave the farm and come back to the city. Robert will tell you how we said good-bye."

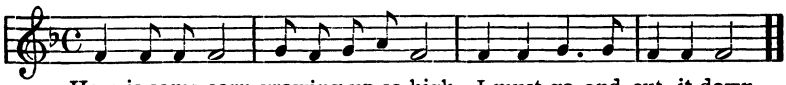
"The coach is at the door at last,
The eager children mounting fast,
And kissing hands in chorus sing:
'Good-bye, good-bye, to everything.'"[2]

M.: "While we were away, the things we had planted in our garden at school had been growing and growing. We went into the garden when we got back to school and found the corn was ripe and the stalks must be cut down. Louise made up this song:"

[2] R. L. Stevenson's "Farewell to the Farm."

Sung and acted by Louise:

VIII

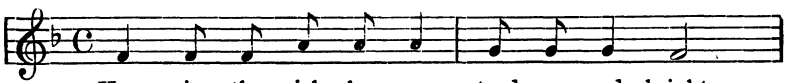


Here is some corn growing up so high, I must go and cut it down.

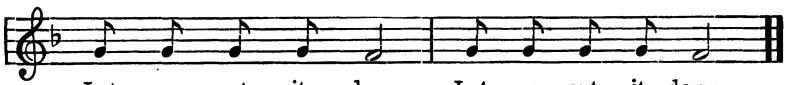
SONG OF THE CORN

M.: "Herbert cut it down and made up this song:"

IX



Here is the sick - le, so stead - y and bright,



Let us cut it down, Let us cut it down.

M.: "Now our garden and the farm are all ready for winter. The wind is calling the leaves. They will play a little while and then go to sleep."

("Come Little Leaves"—music by Horatio Parker, sung by entire class.)

While this programme is chiefly related to nature-work, other experiences are often sung. Games are originated, sung, and played. Dolly is lulled to sleep, and playmates are invited to join a game. In fact, every activity is carried along in song as well as in any other way. The children themselves are the guides, and their enjoyment of the work as well as their originality in it is a source of constant inspiration and help to the teacher.